Toccata and Fugue (Al Fine)

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Toccata and Fugue (Al Fine)

by claritylore

Summary

When Will took out Francis Dollarhyde, the so-called Tooth Fairy, he thought the danger to his family was over. But there are more monsters lurking in the shadows than he ever knew, and they're watching him now...

This is the final part of the Toccata and Fugue series.

Notes

WARNING: Slight spoilers for both Silence of the Lambs and Hannibal. This is a bit of a mashup of background stories and is approximately 80% more convoluted than previous installments.

Chapter 1

From way out on the calm ocean, their home on the beach looked like no more than a small light on a distant island. It was a marker in the inkwell of the night and it reminded Will of all those times he'd stood far across the plains from his house in Wolf Trap and looked back through the rolling mists, when it looked like a ship out at sea, safe in isolation.

His son sat at the back of the boat, looking back to the shore, as he always did. When Will laid anchor and they stopped, he almost saw William's shoulders relaxing at last, his expression calming. He knew how he felt; the house looked contained, and the bad memories of what had happened that night seemed to be held at bay inside it.

He didn't know exactly why this had seemed like the right thing to do when he returned from the hospital to a son who was withdrawn and haunted by nightmares that had rendered him unable even to speak. Kray Sanchez, a local with a lot of boats for hire, and a constant need for a trustworthy person to sort out their engines, had offered the use of them as a welcome home gesture, and he'd known what to do. Will just knew, somehow, that this was the only thing that would help.

He lay back on the cushions out on the back deck of the Windspire and stared up at the stars above them. It took a few minutes but then his son was with him, curling into his side and resting his head on his shoulder. Will pulled him close and kissed the top of his head.

"It's alright, buddy. We're safe here."

It would take a while for sleep to come, and normally Will let the calm sounds of the ocean soothe them both. But tonight, while the weather was accommodating and the ocean dreamy, he knew it was time to start the process of confrontation. William couldn't go on like this, a prisoner of his fears. Platitudes and reassurances about how their attacker was dead and they were safe now were not snapping him out of it.

Molly had already found a child psychologist and set her to work prodding around inside William's head, apparently before Will was even out of the ER. He hated the whole idea of it and made it known to his wife. It was a violation, nothing less than that in his eyes, and her persistence with it enraged him in a way he could barely disguise.

Things were not going well at all. Whatever initial forgiveness Molly had bestowed when he returned from Baltimore reeking of Hannibal Lecter, and however sincere his desire to maintain their life together had been, both had been damaged by the chain of events that swiftly followed.

They had been tracked down and attacked, in the home she had loved as a child, which she had shared with him out of kindness and love, by a psychopath. Will's face had been mutilated by a deep laceration that ran from the apple of his left cheek, over his nose and down to his jaw, taking over his face like the tattooed representation of the darkness that was spreading beneath.

This man had come for Will, and Will alone, but they were all scarred. His son had seen their family pet murdered horrendously, been manhandled into their home and threatened with a shard of glass by an insane killer, and then thought he'd seen his father shot dead. Unsurprisingly, William was not the same child now. Molly, in her fear and helplessness, quietly blamed Will for bringing that evil back with him like a plague, and Will knew how she felt; he couldn't even look at his reflection without feeling remorse.

"Things have been pretty hard around here," he said, and felt William tense. "Your mother and I... well, it's got difficult. It was my fault that man came after us. I think, well, I'm pretty sure we're not going to be able to stay here much longer. I know you don't feel safe in that house anymore and neither does she. She's been talking about going to stay with her parents...." Will paused to gulp, unsure of how best to continue. "Molly and I aren't going to be able to live together much longer and she wants you to go stay with her for a while, with grandma and grandpa."

William sat up and looked down at him with a heartbreaking questioning in his eyes.

"You have to understand, it's not that I want you to go. God, never. I... I don't know what I'd do without you. But I want you to decide. She's been your mother since you were born and, well, I can't make the decision for you. I'm sorry... this is the hardest thing I'll ever ask you to do."

His son studied him, those Lecter family eyes shining in the moonlight. He slowly settled back down and clung onto him, tightly. Will hoped, but couldn't be certain, that it was an indication that maybe, just maybe, he might want to stick with his strange, disfigured, broken wreck of a dad.

Something hit his chest. It took him a second to realise that it was William's fist. It crashed down again, and was then joined by his other one. His son's face was twisted with unsuppressed tears as he continued to hit him, faster and faster, some innate frustration he wasn't able to communicate to Will spilling out violently. The blows didn't hurt physically but they hurt Will inside.

"Stop it," he said and caught his son's hands to still him, "hey, shhh." Will sighed and tried to get William to settle back down. "I know why you're upset."

He recalled the moment he discovered that William was listening through an ajar door as Molly finally let her real feelings about his rejoining with his mate out. He didn't know how much his son had heard but he felt absolutely gut punched all the same when he saw him. And the seething look Molly gave him when he'd shouted at her to shut up hadn't helped to defuse the situation.

"It's hard for me to talk about your father. I know you heard me and Molly arguing about him the other night," Will said, and weighed his words up to find the right ones. "It's true, when I went to Baltimore, I went to see him. We're... bonded in a special way. That's why we have you. We wanted you more than anything in the world." If nothing else, he needed his son to know that. "The thing is, he's... it's not possible for us to be together now. I can go see him out there though. So I think... I think I'm going to go and stay somewhere in Baltimore when Molly leaves. Just until I've figured things out, anyway."

He couldn't stay in Molly's house, where his blood had stained the floor of their bedroom and dripped through the floorboards to the room below. It scared him to be there too, in the place where his imagination was running wild with visions of the hulking great form of Dollarhyde. He couldn't go back to Wolf Trap as he'd sold that house a long time ago for much the same reason; it hadn't felt safe anymore.

There was one other option, of course, as imparted to him by lawyers some years ago, when he wasn't ready to even contemplate anything related to Hannibal Lecter. The Baltimore house that Lecter owned, where they'd bonded and conceived their son, had been legally placed into his ownership months prior to Hannibal being outed as the Chesapeake Ripper, thereby preventing its sale by the authorities post investigation. It was all just as Hannibal had planned, from the very first day he'd gone into Will's house and swapped his fertility regulating pills with placebos. Everything was prearranged intricately, including - according to the wording of the legal documents - a home for his future son or daughter to inherit.

But Will wasn't about to go there.

"I want you to come with me but I don't know if it's the best thing for you."

Will had to let it be William's choice, and his choice alone.

"Don't worry, we won't be going straightaway. You have some time to decide. And whatever you decide, I will love you. Forever and ever. You know that."

A slight choke and a guttural noise escaped William's throat. It was as if he was trying to speak but couldn't force the words out at all. Even if it was a purely psychosomatic response to the trauma he'd suffered, Will knew it wasn't willful. The frustration it caused him was plain to see. "You know, something bad happened to your father and he didn't speak for a long time either. He was about your age too." The way his son stilled and seemed to stop breathing told him Will had struck a chord of interest. "He got better and you will too. I promise."

It felt strange talking about Hannibal to their son, after so many years of avoiding the subject with half truths and distractions. Just as it was strange to finally admit that he needed his mate, to the degree that he was going to leave his wife and go to Baltimore to make it possible to see him regularly. It was starting to feel worryingly liberating, to let his morals finally start to sink into the scars of his past good deeds, now marking him all over, mangling him with undeserved ugliness, and into the blackness that was chained like an infected and slow-beating heart beneath.

"Get some sleep, buddy," he said, knowing his son's thoughts were racing.

William shook his head and stuck his hand into his dad's shirt pocket to get his phone. He pulled up a notepad on it and started typing. When he was done, he handed it to his dad.

if i come can i see him

Another little piece of Will combusted and died in his chest. "I... I don't know." He switched his phone off and tucked it back in his pocket, making it clear that that conversation couldn't

continue.

Out in the distance, the lights in the beach house were switched off as Molly went to bed, leaving them floating in the night, where the stars were bright and endless like the ocean beneath them, and they lay alone together in the soothing darkness that felt like home now.

*

Will was pretty surprised when a letter from the State Department of Baltimore landed on his doormat. He was even more surprised by its content.

It was a legal letter, notifying him, as designated Bondmate, of a change in his visitation rights. As Hannibal Lecter was due to to be transferred to the Brushy Mountain State Penitentary in Memphis, Tennessee, his permit would be rendered void and he would have to reapply in the new state of residence for the named prisoner.
It literally floored him.

Will was reaching for his phone before he even stopped for breath. It rang a few times and then picked up with a click.

"Crawford."

"Memphis?"

There was an audible sigh on the other end of the line. "Hi Will. You really don't watch the news anymore, do you?"

"Fill me in."

For a second, he thought Jack would refuse. There was a tense pause. "Have you heard of Buffalo Bill?" he growled at last.

"If you'll recall, I've been kind of out of action. Something to do with getting shot and my face being torn half off." If he sounded bitter, that was fine. He was.

"He's killed five women so far. Keeps them alive a few days, then he skins them and dumps them. I didn't come to you because I knew you wouldn't want to get involved again. You ah... I never got the chance to tell you how sorry we all were about what happened, you know, with Dollarhyde. I saw Molly in the hospital a few times but..."

"It's fine. Look, tell me what's going on. Please. You owe me that."

"Buffalo Bill has kidnapped another girl, the daughter of a Senator in Tennessee. The Senator is the one pulling the strings on this. Since I didn't have you to help out, I asked one of my best trainees to talk to Lecter for some insights, and she found out that he had a lead on our perp. He traded what he knew for a ticket out of the Baltimore State Hospital."

Will's thoughts were tumbling around his mind and getting tangled. He didn't even know where to start. "He's already been moved? Why? Why would he do that?"

"There's more privacy. It's... a change of scenery I guess."

"Wait... you sent a trainee to talk to Hannibal?" he snorted. He couldn't help it. "Evoking the spirit of Miriam Lass, Jack?" Just like he'd used Will and his impending heat to get Hannibal to lead them to Dollarhyde, he was still throwing down pawns to force a checkmate. The man never changed.

The phone almost melted in his hand, so obvious was the anger radiating over the line from the other end. "You have no right to judge me," Crawford barked eventually. "What do you want me to say? You were in a goddamned hospital bed... one I sent to you to. Are you telling me that you would have run back to help us if I'd have called?"

Will couldn't respond the way he wanted to. Jack was, unfortunately, right. His conscience was a far more battered and dented thing now than it had been when he'd seen those photos of Dollarhyde's victims and felt compelled to help. Doing his best then had effectively cost him his marriage, nearly cost him his life, and worst of all, it had ripped away his son's innocence. Will was done with caring, when every killer taken down was just replaced with another, the cycle of death continuing with or without his efforts.

"I didn't have many options... and honestly, this girl could be your sister Will."

"Wait... you picked her out because she looked like me?"

"She's a brunette Omega with big blue eyes and a problem with keeping her empathy in check. But she's also got a good nose for this."

"You're unbelievable."

"She got a lot of leads." Crawford actually sounded like he'd been surprised by how effective this trainee had been. "You can come in on this if you want, but thanks to her we've got a name and we're making inquiries right now. It's only a matter of time before we catch him." Jack's tone softened a little. "Look, I will do what I can with the paperwork. That's what this is about, isn't it? Visitation."

"No!" he snapped, too quickly. "Yes. I... I'm already prepping to leave Florida. Too much has happened here. I don't have my house in Wolf Trap anymore so I was thinking of setting down in Baltimore. This just... took me by surprise."

Jack took a moment, his breathing wheezy across the receiver. "You still can, come back I mean. I can always do with a consultant on these type of cases. Off record, of course."

That actually made Will chuckle. "Sure you can." He looked at the letter in his hand again, slightly regretting his impulsive call now the fog of confusion was clearing. "I guess I need to put in for the Bondmate Programme in Memphis. I don't suppose it'll be as quick a process..."

"I'll do what I can on this end, just as soon as this case is over."

"I only have a month," Will added, quickly. Two months recuperating in the hospital and a month of trying to get back to normality, and singularly failing, had left him counting the

days to his next heat. He was burning for the solace of being with his mate.

"Noted." Something was ringing in the background and taking Crawford's attention away. "I have to go. Call me if you want in on this case."

The line went dead before he could respond. He stared at his phone for a few moments, heart fluttering.

Will turned to go to the living room and walked into Molly. She was about to say something, but he dismissed her with his hand and went past her, only half aware of the obvious offence it caused. He quickly opened up the cabinet in the front room that kept their seldom used TV shut away. He had to search the drawers to find its remote and then reeducate himself in its use in order to get it to turn on.

He only dimly noticed Molly's presence in the doorway and did nothing to acknowledge her. That was how it was these days.

The cycling news bulletins didn't take long to fill him in with the information he sought.

A pre-recorded interview with a smartly dressed woman in her fifties flashed on screen, interspersed with old photos of a girl, her daughter, as a child.

I'm speaking now to the person who is holding my daughter. Catherine is very gentle and kind. Talk to her and you'll see. You have the power. You are in charge. I know you can feel love and compassion. You have a wonderful chance to show the whole world that you can be merciful as well as strong, that you're big enough to treat Catherine better than the world has treated you. You have that power. Please. My daughter is Catherine.

"That's smart," he muttered to himself as the bulletin moved on.

"He keeps repeating her name," Molly observed, quietly.

"If he sees Catherine as a person and not just an object, it's harder to tear her up."

He clicked the TV off and took a moment to gather himself. Will looked inside his mind, almost splitting himself in two, the young scar-free Will asking the older disfigured and bullet-hole ridden Will to do something; to get involved and save Catherine Martin somehow. He saw himself smothering his younger self and standing over the body with dead eyes.

In the smokey black reflection of the empty TV screen, he looked into the awful scar across his face and saw it growing. Will tried to care, he really did, but that person just wasn't there anymore.

Wordlessly, he turned and left the room, barely even noticing Molly as she watched him leave with tears rolling down her cheeks.

Chapter 2

Will wasn't concerned at first when William didn't arrive home at his usual time. He'd seen him earlier near Kray's boathouse, half a mile along the beachfront, when he'd gone down there to fix one of the boats. His son had been playing fetch with their neighbour's dog, Emile. The Frenchman who owned him tended to be out during the day so he left the pooch, a droopy eyed mutt with an exuberant nature, in a penned area outside his home and had long ago confirmed that he didn't mind if William walked him with Lady so long as he brought him back before six.

After what had happened to poor Lady, Will figured that it was good for William to move past her death by still spending time with the other dog. It seemed like it would be therapeutic.

Their evening meal was ready on the table by the time night was creeping over the horizon, which was usually William's cue to appear. But he didn't.

Worry, like a heatrash, crept under Will's collar and he couldn't finish, or pretend that he was listening to anything Molly said. He kept glancing out of the window, expecting to see his son appear. When he didn't, Will decided to abandon his chicken salad to take a walk back in the direction of the boathouse before it got dark.

He passed by the neighbour's house, around a curve from theirs, and peered into the garden to see if he could spot Emile. The absence of the dog calmed him for a moment, until he realised the owner was home and the dog was inside with him, leaping around excitedly as food was retrieved from a cupboard.

Teeth set on edge, Will continued onwards, back towards the boathouse. He refrained from calling out William's name as it seemed unnecessary at this point. He was still holding onto the sense that it was a harmless forgetfulness on his son's part and nothing more.

Kray was sitting out on his porch, sucking on his havanas and knocking back whiskey on the rocks. He looked at Will with a puzzled expression as he approached. "Mr Graham? Uh... I thought..." The man stood up and looked out at the bay, thick creases appearing in his forehead.

"What?"

"Aren't you out on the Windspire again tonight?"

Will followed his gaze out into the ocean and saw the small ship bobbing on the waves, heading outwards. He squinted but couldn't see anything else.
"I saw your kid earlier, I thought..."

"Do you have any binoculars or something?"

"Uh, maybe." Kray went back into his house and he heard the sound of a drawer being emptied. The elderly Mexican returned with a miniature set, which he duly handed over. His hands were shaking, but that wasn't really anything new with him. A lifetime of living too well had taken its toll on the guy prior to his retirement and was only getting worse.

Will looked through and found the boat. Sure enough, William was sitting on the seats at the back, in his usual place. "Shit. What the hell is he doing?" He handed the binoculars back and grabbed the set of keys hanging from Kray's belt before running for the boathouse. "Sorry. I need to borrow the Spirit. I'll bring them both back soon as I can. I promise."

"Should I call the coastguard?" Kray called after him.

"No, I'll handle it. Really sorry about this!"

Will prepared Kray's speedboat, the Spirit of Freedom, for launch in double quick time. While he was reasonably sure his son knew enough about sailing to handle a relatively new motorboat if the weather took a turn, he couldn't be sure of his state of mind. William was still a few months off his eighth birthday. It wasn't safe and Will felt breathless panic trying to settle over him as he launched and headed out to chase the ship down.

The sky ahead was tinged with red and there were some ominous clouds forming above that Will didn't want to think about just yet. It looked like rain, maybe even a storm was approaching, so he knew he had to act fast.

He couldn't see William anymore when he got near. It was a tricky manoeuvre, slowing the speedboat down and then trying to nudge it towards the backend of the motorboat, where the ladder for leisure divers to use when returning was located.

Will looked around for something to tether the boats together and found some tangled up ropes in the back. The speedboat was often used to take people out parasailing but Kray hadn't tidied up since its last excursion. Will didn't bother trying to unknot anything. He leaned out and used all his strength to grab the bottom of the ladder and haul his boat close enough to tie them together. For a second, he thought his arm was going to pop out, and the puckered wound in his side ached with the unexpected exertion.

When at last they were connected, he hopped across and started to climb the ladder.

He heard voices and it stilled him. He couldn't make out the words, the waves were drowning them out, but he realised that one of the voices was William's. That alone was enough to take his breath away; it felt like an age since he'd heard him speak.

Will cursed himself for not bringing his gun with him. Hell, he hadn't even switched out of his indoor sandals. He looked down to the speedboat but didn't see anything that he could use as a weapon. So he knew he'd have to move quickly.

He pulled up just enough to peer over the side and by leaning around he found he could see William, sitting by the steering station at the centre of the boat. There was someone else with him, a man he thought, though all he could see was a shoulder and part of his head. He was wearing a white linen suit, with a white trilby perched on a head of longish golden hair.

Stealthily, Will climbed over the side and crouched down to scurry closer along the deck.

All of a sudden, the wind changed, and his mouth went dry as a familiar scent washed through him amidst the salty smell of the spray.

The stranger stopped speaking abruptly and stood up. Except Will already knew that he wasn't a stranger.

All pretence of sneaking up on them was gone. They turned towards each other and stared.

"Hello Will," Hannibal said, peering at him through large rimmed shades.

"Dad!" William cried and ran to him. He latched his arms around him. He looked oddly excited. "Dad, you came."

Hannibal pulled off the sunglasses and then removed the trilby and the wig he was wearing underneath it together. He dropped them aside on the seat and then looked back up to Will through his eyelashes.

"I'm sorry to have caused you any alarm. Really, I had only intended to remain for a short time to meet my son. This excursion was his idea."

"I knew you'd come and find us," William confirmed, solemnly, like he wasn't sure if he was in trouble or not.

Will blinked and kneeled down, looking at his son closely, holding him too hard by the arms. "Are you alright? What were you thinking?" He sighed and then started. "You're talking, I don't believe it..."

William looked over to Hannibal, smiling a little. He had no fear of him at all, Will realised.

"The boy had a lot of questions. I walked him through a few cognitive exercises that helped me many years ago and he pushed through the mental block. We have had a very productive evening."

Overhead the first throaty growl of thunder gently rumbled away and the rain started to fall, thin like the spray.

Hannibal drifted over to the side of the boat and looked back to the shore. "I fear we do not have much time," he said, and pointed outwards.

Will left his son to go and see what he was referring to. Back on the distant shore, he saw the flashing red and blue lights of a cop car parked up outside of their home. "The police... they know you're here..."

"No. You are my family. They of course suspect I will seek you out but I have not led them here."

Cold pricks of rain clung to Will's curls as he turned to Hannibal at last, staring at him in disbelief. "H-how? Did you... did you break out?"

Hannibal's hand rested on his cheek, his thumb stroking the part-healed scar that now took over his face, almost sadly. "There are more monsters in the world than Francis Dollarhyde, and I'm afraid a great many of them have an interest in me... and you. Both of you." His other hand rested on Will's hip and Will couldn't help but breathe his mate in, unable to do anything but welcome his presence. "I told you I would do anything to keep you and my son safe. I'm sorry to say, a certain level of immediate danger means that I can no longer remain incarcerated and fulfill that duty."

The kiss Will initiated seemed to take Hannibal quite by surprise; perhaps he had been expecting anger, or fight, or further protest because Will had always been so clear about his moral duty to turn him in and make him pay for his crimes.

In fact it was Hannibal who gently prised them apart this time, which felt strange. The fugitive smiled and still held him tightly, making it very clear that he would give anything to never have to let go. He breathed the sea air in deeply through his nose, looking upwards to the sky, and Will thought he saw the momentary shine of tears in Hannibal's eyes, quickly pushed aside by his usual superhuman levels of self control.

"What now?" Will breathed, almost afraid to ask.

"We must move quickly. The two of you must return to the shore and pretend it was William alone who set sail. He has gone through a lot and you have been sailing in the evenings quite frequently, I am told." Hannibal threw a private smile towards his son, who returned it like he was acknowledging a shared secret. "I will take this boat."

Will felt a tug on his sleeve and discovered William on the other end of it. "Let him take the Spirit. She's faster," he whined at a whisper. "Please dad? I filled her up with gas earlier and put a spare can in the back from the storage hold."

He stared at his son with a note of disbelief, not even able to confront that insight. Instead, he returned his attention to Hannibal. "Where are you going?"

"It's better that you don't know." Hannibal pulled him closer again and kissed him more fervently. It felt like he was making a promise. "William is a very bright boy. You need do nothing now but trust in him to steer you."

Hannibal let Will go and knelt down in front of William. He enfolded the boy in his arms, tenderly. "I have wanted to meet you for so long. You are everything I wanted. I am... more proud of you than I can say."

"I know," William mumbled. He was putting on his bravest face, but seemed truly upset that Hannibal had to leave.

Seeing them both together was so strange to Will, every inherited trait seeming magnified in his son by the comparison. There really was no mistaking his parentage, to a degree Will hadn't even really acknowledged, since he naturally saw his own traits more clearly when it had been just the two of them for so long. He knew that it was normal in a firstborn Alpha-Omega pair child to look more like the Alpha, for evolutionary reasons related to forming the

all-important bond between mates that kept their genetic lines pure and their family ties strong.

After placing a kiss on the top of his son's head, Hannibal returned to his feet and walked over to retrieve his hat, the messy blonde wig and the old sunglasses he had been hiding behind. He seemed to be steeling himself against what was next to come.

"No..." Will gasped, suddenly realising through the fog of surreality that he was about to lose him. He ran over and threw himself into Hannibal's arms, all pretence falling away. "Don't go. Not yet." The morality that once clung to him like a second skin had, as he feared, finally shed. The snake he'd always feared lived underneath, feeding on the hideous insights that had been granted by his too-sharp empathy was at last crawling out. "I... *need* you."

Three simple words that proclaimed his change indelibly.

"As I need you." Hannibal rested their foreheads together, damp with the rain and the pain of yet another separation. "I wish I had more time, to explain everything I wish to explain. I don't. So you must simply trust in me. Four weeks."

"Four weeks," Will repeated and took it to heart.

The storm gathered overhead and Hannibal became a blur as he walked away from them.

Will stood beside his son and watched the speedboat flying off into the distance, the legend on the side, 'Spirit of Freedom', catching the light like a footnote from some sort of cosmic joker.

"You know where he's going?" Will asked.

"I can't tell you." The boy looked up to him and grinned.

"You know, you're starting to frighten me."

William looked entirely proud of himself. "We need to go home. I will pretend not to talk still and we can say the Spirit sank." He ran across to the pulley and started to raise the anchor.

"Kray is going to kill me," Will said, starting to return to his senses. He followed William into the control room and got the engines started again. "You know, it's all going to look pretty suspicious. I mean, this boat trip you took is easy to explain, but losing his speedboat all of a sudden. I mean, I guess you know that your father broke out of a maximum security prison..."

"He told me."

"Told you what exactly?"

The child shrugged. "Everything, I guess."

That didn't sit easily with Will. "And you weren't scared of him?"

"When... when I heard you and mom arguing, she mentioned his name. So I... Googled him. Hannibal in Baltimore. Hannibal the ca-nni-bal." Something in the way his voice wavered actually stopped Will from being able to breathe. "I knew it was him when I saw him watching me today. But it's okay," he continued, quickly. "It's all okay now."

"I'm not sure it is..."

"He came to protect us. Please dad, just trust us."

There it was. The word 'us' had entered the picture somehow. It had sneaked in when he wasn't looking and spun his world upsidedown.

Sensationalist magazines and websites liked to spin old wives tales about a preternatural connection existing between an Alpha and their firstborn; tales of near-supernatural concoction, about Alphas finding their children in odd circumstances after years of separation, tracking them down despite efforts being made to keep them apart, even suffering nightmares that warn them of danger, which of course then led them to making some sort of spectacular rescue of their precious firstborn. The process worked both ways too and, occasionally, extended to blood bonded mates as well. Will had never placed much stock in those sort of stories before, but he was starting to wonder now.

Of all the ways he had expected William to react when the day finally came, and he couldn't hide Hannibal from him anymore, he had never considered the possibility of acceptance. He'd never looked into his son's eyes, with their familiar shine and steel, and wondered about what he'd brought into the world.

"He's not like that man who... who killed Lady, and... you know," William said, almost as if reading his thoughts. "He only hurts the bad people."

Will choked on the tears that overwhelmed him. "Oh god," he gasped and hid his face aside. *From the mouths of babes,* he thought. It was so much easier to put it in those terms, on the level of a seven year old boy, but Will knew it wasn't true. Hannibal was no saintly vigilante; he killed in cold blood, under his own set of insane rules, because he enjoyed eating people. Will knew this and he had come to accept his place at Hannibal's side in his court of madness and blood. But had he really fallen so far that he was prepared to accept the same fate for William?

There were a lot of questions waiting for them when they returned. Will didn't quite know how he was going to respond at first, when Molly came running towards them, two cops following behind her.

The Will of old would have told the truth, or at least tried harder to. He should have told them that Hannibal had been there, even if it was part of a story about him kidnapping his son before making an escape, because even that would have given them some chance to track him down. The Will of old would have turned him in because he was an unrepentant serial killer who did not deserve to be free, regardless of any personal anguish that would have caused.

The man whose face had been slashed in two and shot twice, his good deeds rewarded with pain and scars, was infinitely more selfish. He knew, as his former self hadn't, that doing the

right thing meant nothing, not really. He'd gained no cosmic brownie points. He'd felt no particular sense of righteousness when he'd killed the Minnesota Shrike or the Tooth Fairy. Hollywood had not written his ending.

So now his loyalty was to himself, to his son, and to the one person he couldn't live without. The time had come to put aside false introspection on the matter.

Will stuck to the lie as agreed, while the thunder raged overhead and the rain came down hard on the roof of their house, and invited the local police to stick around for a few days in case Hannibal did try to get in touch. He gave them his phone too, so it could be tapped, and went through the motions perfectly.

He then went to bed and slept soundly through the storm, for once untroubled by his conscience or imagination.

Chapter 3

"I'm not sure this was a good idea," Will admitted, his voice trembling with the flashbacks that assaulted him the moment he stepped into what had once been Hannibal's hallway. The house was cold and empty, like the corpses that had passed through it. Bits of police tape were still left around the place where they hadn't been removed properly and layers of dust had settled across the years of its abandonment.

William ventured forwards, using his flashlight to illuminate the space with a fair amount of wonder at the size of it. "You said that in Wolf Trap."

"No, I'm pretty sure I said that one was *definitely* not a good idea."

It had been a very strange detour to take. William was adamant that they had to go there first and so that was where they went, though they didn't drive up close enough to the house to be seen by the current occupants. Instead, William had asked his dad to remain in the car while he crept there under the cover of night and disappeared from sight. He returned after ten tense minutes, hands covered in dirt, clutching an old tin box.

Will had been amazed to learn that William had been instructed as to its location - in the crawlspace underneath the house - by Hannibal, and that it contained the old fertility pills that he had removed from his house all those years ago to force Will into a more active sense of need when his heat approached. It also contained a set of keys and a loaded gun, the latter of which he took out of William's hands very quickly indeed.

William instructed that their next stop was to be Baltimore, as planned, but he had a very specific idea as to the location. And sure enough, one of the keys had opened the front door to Hannibal's boarded up and long empty house.

"We shouldn't be here," Will said, inexplicably feeling a need to keep his voice down.

"Why not? This house belongs to us." The boy flipped the lightswitch in the hallway a few times but nothing happened.

"Everything will have been cut off years ago. We can't stay here."

"Yeah." William peered around the corner into the living room with his flashlight.

Strange shadows were being brought out by the dancing light and they made Will's head hurt. The ghosts of this house had lived in his imagination for years. Returning was more daunting than he had thought it would be when it was finally stated as their destination.

He followed his son into the living room and, despite its shell-like appearance now, the first of many memories were triggered. *Right here, where I'm standing, is where he kissed me for the first time... before I knew what he was.*

"Wow. This place is huuuge," William enthused, still looking around with no real awareness. He only saw a house; his dad saw a mausoleum.

The boy wandered through the doorway leading to the dining room and started as Will suddenly yelled out "No!" and grabbed him back. "Don't go in there."
"Wh... why?"

Will didn't have the words to tell him that he feared the ghosts still haunting that dining table, including the one who had given William his middle name as an act of remembrance; the undeserving rival Alpha whom Hannibal had torn to pieces and displayed there, Josh. "Just... what are we looking for?"

"The study."

"Okay, that's... I think that's upstairs." Will gratefully steered his son back to the hallway and they started up the stairs together.

The creaking sound set off a strange, dreamy memory, of Hannibal carrying him up those steps, right before claiming him and mating him at last. For a split second, he almost thought he was floating again, eyes sliding closed with the sensation. He had to fight it back to keep going.

William innocently shone his flashlight into the master bedroom and this time he noticed the way his dad gasped in and went pale. "No, I think it's at the end, down there," Will said, trying to keep his reaction subtle and entirely failing.

"Okay," William said and ran ahead. He had so much energy, despite the long drive, it was almost unbelievable. He bounced into the room long before Will made it there and was already climbing on a chair and shining his flashlight into a hole in the wall when Will found the strength to go after him. "Dad, over here. Help me with this?"

Will moved closer and saw that the hole in the wall was actually an open safe, the side of it covered in dents like it the door had once been prized open. It was empty.

"What are you looking for?"

"It has a fake back. We gotta pull it out."

Will grabbed his son's hand to direct the flashlight around the room, looking for something that might help. The place had been pretty well cleared out by the police but a quick check through the drawers of the abandoned mahogany desk yielded a metal ruler. He returned to the safe and tried to dig it into the join between the sides and the back. Slowly it slid in and, after digging a few times, the entire thing popped forward, making William yelp in surprise.

Out tumbled a neatly wrapped plastic bag, cleverly packaged to fit perfectly into the three or so inches of space that the carefully inserted false back panel had concealed.

"Bingo!" said William. "Open it, open it!"

"Alright, alright, in a minute. I need to think this through." Will felt thoroughly uneasy about this. This was, technically, potential evidence. It went against all his FBI training, such as it was, to ignore how many laws he was violating just by handling it.

William didn't want to wait, so he grabbed it instead and leapt down from the chair, heavy feet thudding on the floor.

"No," Will snapped, "not here. We need to leave here, now."

"But..."

"William." He gave him the 'final warning' voice and his son duly quieted down. Will took the package out of William's hand and stuffed it into the inside pocket of his jacket as far as it would go, like a guilty secret. "Come on."

"It is kinda creepy here," William conceded as they wandered back along the corridor and down the stairs, heading back towards the front door.

"Yep. So let's go find somewhere else to stay tonight. Unless you have any more super-secret errands for me to run?"

"Nah. Oh but... could we pick up some Baskin Robbins on the way?"

The cold night air that rushed around them as Will pulled the front door open was cleansing. It felt good to be out of that house, with all its dark associations.

Will shook his head and snorted. "Now I know your Father didn't make *that* part of his instructions."

"He prefers people to ice-cream." William waited a beat before starting to laugh.

"That's not funny," Will insisted, despite the smile that cracked his facade, hidden as he angled his face towards the door and locked the place up tight.

"Sorry," William said and covered his mouth with his hand to stifle his urge to giggle.

"You'd better be, buddy." He pulled his son close to his side and prodded him in the ribs. "It's not good to joke about stuff like that." Yet Will couldn't deny how glad he felt to see his son smiling again, after all of the sadness and fear. It was doing him good to have a complete change of scenery and a new purpose.

They walked down the street together in silence and back to the car, which Will had parked at a distance in an effort to make it less obvious that the old Lecter House of Horrors had received its first visitors in a long time. He was very aware of how their visiting the place barely a week after Hannibal's prison break might be construed by the FBI.

Then they got back onto the road.

*

William sat down at the table of the motel room, tub of ice-cream in hand. The look Will gave him told him in no uncertain terms that he wasn't going to be eating that before bed. The boy seemed to consider protesting, but put it back in the freezer without making a fuss. He then returned to the table to watch Will open up the bag from the safe.

The first thing to pop out was a wad of cash that made William's eyes bulge out. Stuck in next to it was a business card for a 'Alfonzo DeArgio: Artist', with an artful script written on the reverse reading, 'passport $3000, birth certificate $2000, social security $7000, poste haste $10000', plus a number and a Baltimore address.
The next thing to fall out was a ring. It looked old and sturdy, some kind of signet ring, with a white oval fixed to the front depicting a serpent wearing a crown, the figure of a man trapped in its jaws, apparently being eaten down. This Will placed it to one side.

Next came a small guidebook, the front depicting a building in Florence with the legend 'Palazzo Vecchio', the inside script entirely written in Italian. Will knew he'd have to look through it line by line for clues. A preliminary flip through revealed a brochure for The International School of Florence stuck in the back, which was in English.

Some folded scraps of newspaper tumbled out together next, yellowed with age, folds very well indented in the fragile paper. Will picked one at random and opened it up.

MAN CUTS OFF OWN FACE, FEEDS IT TO DOGS

The title alone was enough to turn Will's stomach, and he didn't want William getting a closer look at what was sure to be a vile report, so he quickly folded it up again and swept them all to one side for later examination.

He reached for the final item, a folded letter, written in careful and flowing script:

My dear Will,
I write this note in a time of expectation. I have only recently come to the acceptance that you, strange you, must be my mate. I hope, however, that you exist in a time far beyond this point.
It has never been in my will, or of my nature, to desire to bond - quite how you called to me, I will leave to the poets.
If you are reading this note now, all these expectations and desires of mine have come to be. So what of its purpose, this note from our past? I do not write to gloat, I write to warn.
I have a concern in relation to the fate of a former patient of mine. This gentleman is a vile, worthless and now quite pitiable being with an unnatural interest in the suffering of children. For my efforts in matching the face to the interior, I expect some retribution.
The scorpion does not dare strike me, lest more parts be severed, but he may find a progeny of interest if so informed.

The first page ended there. Before beginning on the second, Will sat back and considered what he had read for a moment.

The attack on his family by Francis Dollarhyde had been widely reported by the media, mainly because that particular serial killer was responsible for the killing of one of their own. They were already out for his blood. Details, like the general location of their home, and the age of his son, had been reported by some while Will was unconscious in the hospital. And given that his consulting with Lecter on the case had already been a headline on tattlecrime.com and its imitators, it was pretty obvious to anyone reading closely enough that his son was at the right age to be Hannibal's, and that the old archive reports of a miscarriage were wrong.

He wondered if, ironically, Jack Crawford's attempt to sever his ties with Hannibal by spreading that story about a terrible miscarriage had actually shielded them from the eyes of another who had been watching from the shadows.

Had Hannibal's sudden decision to break free of his prison cell been caused by their run in with Dollarhyde? Was it because their anonymity had been broken and their location revealed by the media? Was this former patient the immediate danger he spoke of?

Will took in a deep breath and began to read the second page.

I have made my peace with the prospect of incarceration.
Your morals burn so brightly, I do not dare hope to quell that flame.
Regardless, my blood will be your blood and I do not expect that
tie to sever easily. So you may be wondering, dear Will, why write
a note that may never be read?
There is an undeniable possibility that I will not be able to protect
you as I would wish to. If this bundle has been spared the
dissection of police forensics, and its location made known to you
in the house I have bequeathed, you will find all that you need to
reach safety within the high walls of Italy.
Yours eternally,
Hannibal Lecter

He noticed that William had picked up the signet ring and was examining it.

Will gently took it from him. "It's been a long day and it's hours past your bedtime. Go brush your teeth."

"Sure. I am tired." He padded over the seat where his backpack had been dropped and searched the pockets for his toothbrush.

"I hope you remembered to pack your jammies."

"Yaaah," William droned, like it should be obvious.

"William, are you going to be able to sleep?"

That stilled both of them for a moment. William's shoulders grew tense and he looked down at his feet, maybe not sure how to answer. The return of his old exuberant self fell away to

reveal the frightened little boy was still there, hiding away underneath. "You'll be here, right?" he asked, in a small voice.

Will felt his stomach knot as he nodded and smiled. "Always will be. Can't get rid of me." He felt a groundswell of emotion; a fervent and burning need to protect his child from all the ills of the world. Even though everything else, his morality and his goodness, was crumbling away he still held that feeling close, and he still felt human because of it.

After tucking William in and waiting for his breathing to even out into sleep, Will returned to the table and looked through the news clippings. Despite the tiredness that was approaching, he needed to know more about this patient. He went back to the first clipping he had picked out and opened it out.

MAN CUTS OFF OWN FACE, FEEDS IT TO DOGS
December 2nd 1999

Police were called to a house in the Toledo area last night after a man was found hanging from a noose with large chunks of his face sliced off in what appears to have been a disturbing act of self mutilation using a shard of glass. Mason Verger, 33, suffered severe neck injuries but survived the ordeal after being discovered by a relative. Sources suggest that the severed pieces of his face, including his nose and one eye, were recovered from the stomachs of Mr Verger's two dogs.

Mr Verger was recently at the center of a case involving accusations of impropriety made by staff and four children at the Christian Life Summer Camp for Orphans, based around Lake Michigan. Although the Judge upheld the charges, his sentence was commuted due to the witnesses failing to appear in court. Mr Verger was given 90 hours of community service and a requirement to submit to court-ordered therapy.

Police declined to comment on whether the incident was connected to his previous charges, save to state that all injuries were conclusively self inflicted and potentially drug related. They are not investigating the possibility of a revenge attack at this time.

Will swallowed a few times against the graphic images swirling in front of his eyes, courtesy of his overactive imagination. He blinked back the vision of a man swinging from a noose, cutting into his own face with a shard of glass, blood and pieces of flesh spraying down everywhere, and he fought the sudden swell of pain across his own face with the memory of another shard of glass slicing his own flesh in two. And then he was choking, the noose around his neck, the shard now in his hand, Dollarhyde standing in front of him smiling, Garrett Jacob Hobbs laughing beside him, Hannibal watching silently and passively, an unholy triad of killers all embedded into his psyche and growing there like cancerous vines, strangling the core that once was Will Graham. All three stood by and watched him choke and splutter and drown in his own blood his screams trapped below the awful noose the shard of glass slicing and cutting and ripping his face the blood dripping down with wolves feasting on his flesh beneath his feet his face gone his self an unrecognisable nothing dangling and empty and lost...

He woke with a start and a gasp, neck immediately stinging from the awkward angle he'd fallen asleep at, his knees thudding the underside of the table. His heart was pounding in his

ribcage.

Will quickly looked across to his son and was relieved to find him sleeping soundly, despite the din in his own ears.

Quietly and quickly, he packed up the collection of artifacts left to him by Hannibal and put them away in his suitcase, like he was forcing an evil spirit back into a bottle. He couldn't stand to look at any more news clippings or even start to think about the prospect of Italy. Instead he crawled into his bed, still shaking.

Sleep was not a thing to be found easily that night, in the strange motel room with the relentless sound of traffic in the distance and the wind rattling the windowpanes. At least, not until William woke up gone midnight and crawled into Will's bed to cling onto him, mumbling something about a bad dream. That seemed to help calm him.

"Four weeks," he sighed and embraced the darkness of rest.

Chapter 4

"In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to Almighty God: Phyllis Crawford. We commit her body to the ground; earth to earth; ashes to ashes, dust to dust. The Lord bless her and keep her, the Lord maketh his face to shine upon her and be gracious unto her and give her peace. Amen."

Will watched the ashen-faced figure of Jack Crawford, staring down at the coffin, lost in a world of his own. Bella's death had been a surprise to everyone. Jack told him that she had been responding well to the treatment and they'd been optimistic that she would live at least a year longer, even if her cancer was ultimately incurable. Then, only a few nights after the Buffalo Bill case was solved, she'd just... faded.

While Will had been touched to be asked to come along to her funeral with the rest of the old BSU team, he was more so pleased because it gave him a good excuse to stay grounded in Baltimore for an extra week while he decided what to do.

Some innate sense emanating from the back of his mind was very uneasy. Someone was watching him and William, he just knew it. Given that Jack was the only person, aside from Molly, who knew of their move and who might have passed it on as a matter of record, it had to be some bright spark from the police or the FBI looking to be there for an arrest if Hannibal made contact. If he was right, following instructions and flying to Italy now would certainly lead the authorities straight to him, and Will couldn't take that risk.

He'd caught sight of a man in his late fifties, slender, in sunglasses watching them from a car before driving off. He looked like classic special branch. Ordinarily Will wouldn't have thought much of it, but he definitely saw the same guy in a car at the gas station that morning. Something was definitely out of the ordinary; everything he'd learned at the FBI Academy was buzzing in his ear, urging caution.

Will looked around the graveyard in glances, trying not to be too obvious about it. Eventually, he spotted him in the distance, suited in black and watching from the roadside.

Respectfully, he waited for the coffin to be lowered and the ceremony to end before instructing William to go play with Beverley's son and Jimmy's little girl so he could storm over.

He expected the man to disappear again, but this time he stood his ground, smoking a cigarette.

"Why are you following us?" Will demanded.

The man cocked his head and smiled. He took one final drag of his cigarette and then dropped it, crushing the butt under the heel of his very expensive shoes. "Forgive me, I have been prevaricating," he said, with a thick European accent. "In truth I was not entirely certain if I would make this contact. You are, well..." he looked Will up and down with a crooked eyebrow, "rather a mutt."

"Excuse me?"

"After all he was warned." The man shook his head. "Still, I will be polite." At last, he extended his hand. "I am Count Robert Lecter. I am here an on errand, that is, at the behest of my nephew."

Now that Will looked again, the police officer melted away, an object of his paranoia. The black suit took on an old-world look, with a waistcoat and pocket chain, the face that had seemed officious/looking suddenly seemed more familiar, the cheekbones and eyes very much in keeping with the Lecter family genetics. Cautiously, Will accepted the proffered handshake.

"Hannibal mentioned you once."

"Once? Yes." Robert chuckled to himself. "We were not on the best of terms. Yet out of... how do you say, 'out of the blue', he has called me for help."

"Is he safe?" Will asked, too eagerly.

"Perhaps you should ask if you are safe."

Will spun and looked for his son, needing to keep him in his eyeline, those words sending a chill down his spine. He was relieved to see him playing tag around the gravestones with the other children.

The Count moved closer to him soundlessly, apparently following his gaze. "I doubted at first, but he is certainly a Lecter." The man leaned in and breathed in Will's scent, making no attempt to hide what he was doing. "Ah, yes. Certainly."

"Is that why you've been watching us?"

"I needed to be certain. You must understand, my nephew vowed against ever bonding to an Omega. It was the source of much animosity between us."

Will frowned. "I don't follow."

"My wife and I are Betas. Hannibal is an Alpha, of pure blood lines, like his father. It was always to be Hannibal's duty to continue the family name. Yet he showed nothing but distaste at the prospect." Robert gave Will yet another appraising look up and down. "I am glad of the surprise of this boy but you are not what was intended."

The old Will, who lived before Hannibal invaded his being, might have shrunk at the insult, feeling that the man probably had a point. He was a mutt, a nobody from Louisiana with no claim to anything. Now, however, he wasn't about to take that from anyone. "Did you say you came to help us, or to insult us?"

Robert inclined his head as if to accept his point. "I did not come to help you, or my disgraced nephew. Only the boy."

There was something very disconcerting in the way he stated that. Immediately, Will was on edge and feeling wary again.

"It seems Hannibal maintained numerous contacts during his time in prison," Robert continued. "He has been informed that knowledge of his son's existence has reached a party who may be of danger to him, and who is already actively seeking you out."

"Would this be Mason Verger, by any chance?"

The Count hummed and nodded. "Our conversation was brief. He asked that I assist. I will take the boy to Lithuania, to the seat our of family. He will be safe there and you... you may return to your former life. I have a private jet, you need not fear for the child."

Will paused and stared him right in the eyes, those cold eyes that seemed to reach back out and catch him by the throat. "Are you suggesting I just give my son to you?"

"He will be safe with me. You have my word."

Will actually found himself laughing. "This is a joke."

"I do not joke," Robert said, with a deadpan seriousness that echoed Hannibal somehow.

"You arrogant piece of..."

"Hey Will," Beverley's voice suddenly erupted and he span around to see her coming towards them, "we're going back inside for the wake. Jack's falling apart. Are you coming?"

"Yeah. I am." He gave Count Lecter a cold stare to convey his answer in no uncertain terms and made to leave.

The Count glided behind him and grabbed his hand. Into it, he pressed a gilded and thickly cut business card. "Call me," he said, "when you have thought on the matter."

And with that he simply walked away.

*

Will did think on the matter. It was all he could think about, no matter how hard he tried to concentrate on the mingling and the small talk at Bella's wake.

He hadn't known her well. She had been one of Dr Lecter's patients for a time, off record, he knew. Other than that, Will knew of her condition, and had always made an effort to be there for Jack if he wanted to talk, but had never socialised with her particularly. So he didn't feel too terrible at his own preoccupation.

Just as he was considering making his excuses to leave, he felt his phone vibrating in his pocket. Will checked on William's location once more before sliding into the adjoining room to take the call.

"Molly, hi. Sorry I haven't..."

"Will," she gasped and he knew immediately that she was in tears. "Someone was here."

"What?"

"They were looking for you," she sobbed.

"Oh my god, are you alright? What happened? Where are you?"

"Still in the Key... I um, I decided to fly to my parents' next week instead and um... Oh shit, I'm sorry, I'm just so shaky."

"Have you called the police?"

"Yes, they're coming. I just... They were looking for you and William. Kept asking and asking... Wrecked the whole house while I was out..."

Will felt tears unbidden pricking behind his eyes. Not Molly, she had been through so much already, it wasn't fair to drag her into any more of this.

"Did you tell them anything?"

"Yes, I said 'oh they're out in Baltimore with Jack Crawford and the gang'," she snapped, her breaths coming in great huffs. "Of course not! I said I didn't know."

"Sorry, sorry, I had to ask. Are you okay?"

"Aside from a black eye? Just fine."

It broke his heart to hear her crying and breaking apart. If he could have apologised a thousand times at once, he would have.

"What the hell is going on Will?" she asked.

"I don't know but someone's after us. Molly, get to your parents' place and just lay low. I will tell you everything when I can."

"Is William okay?"

"He's fine. We'll call you soon. I'm so sorry this happened to you."

Will clicked off and stood still, swallowing his urge to panic. A sudden hysterical thought struck him; if her phone had been tapped, which wasn't out of the realms of possibility if Molly's house had been gone through, they would now know where Will and his son were.

He found himself turning Count Lecter's business card over and over in his fingers inside his pocket, a cold sick feeling entering his bloodstream.

*

While he hadn't wanted to wait, there were no flights out until the morning. By then, the idea of simply getting the hell away from it all had gotten even more attractive overnight. Before

the Count showed up and Molly called, the idea of going abroad and starting a whole new life had seemed kind of far fetched. Will had barely been out of the country before, aside from a few family holidays with Molly and William. He didn't speak any extra languages; he found it hard enough interacting with people in English, let alone trying to adapt to a whole new culture and set of linguistics. But things were getting serious and he needed to get William to safety. For that purpose, he would move to the North Pole and learn to talk to penguins, if need be.

Will made a point of burning most of the stuff left to him by Hannibal, including the clippings and the letter. He went through the guidebook left behind and found the only entry starred in pen, the *Biblioteca Capponi*, which Google translated as the Capponi Library. It didn't take a lot of digging to discover that the library had closed down a few years prior, so it wouldn't be much help now. Will still made a mental note, just in case, and then burned the guidebook too for good measure. The ring, which he stared at for a while but couldn't bring himself to wear, he put into the innermost pocket of his coat.

Getting rid of the cash was more difficult. It was too much to take with them without having to go through airport declarations, and depositing it into his bank account would look suspicious, given that Will couldn't believe that he wasn't being watched for any sign of making contact or assisting his mate. There was no time to go and get forged passports and use it for that purpose. So instead he took enough to pay for the motel and for their flights and bundled the rest into a package, which he posted to Kray Sanchez in payment for the boat he'd 'lost', and then some.

Then they were ready to go. Will was jumpy and nervous as they checked out of the motel, his thoughts going at a thousand miles an hour. Instead of buying tickets to Florence, he planned to hop to Maine so it would look like they were visiting Molly. From there, he intended to use cash instead of card to get out of country in a more untraceable fashion. With any luck, they could country-hop to Italy without being noticed.

Much as he had thought on Count Lecter's offer of sanctuary, he could tell that it was on the condition of being parted from his son, which was absolutely not an option. Besides, there was something in his condescending manner, and his singular obsession with continuation of the Lecter line, that had left Will too wary to consider the extended olive branch seriously. So to the airport, on the standard routes, it was.

The last thing he remembered, before everything went black, was parking up in a dark corner of the airport's long-stay bay in the multistorey carpark, although later he would recall flashes of nausea, being rolled around on a hard surface and the sound of his son whimpering nearby.

Chapter 5

"Oh, oh yes. The memories. Divine."

Will groaned, his eyelids fluttering. Something nearby was making a raspy din, a repeating pssshhh-tssssshhh rhythm, laying as an undercurrent to the odd raspy metallic voice filling his ears.

"His scent. Just super!"

Instinct was screaming in his ears, telling him to wake up: something was wrong. The clouds blocking his vision slowly parted and he saw light and colour, blurring together. Will kept blinking until things started to make sense.

"Why hello there," the voice near to him said. "You've been sleeping for, well, hours and hours. All day really."

The voice was odd and broken, like it was being spoken through a mouth with the tongue of a snake. Cold hands roamed over him, checking his vitals, and Will decided he must be in hospital yet again. The pssshhh-tssssshhh gassy rhythm he could hear was distinctly medical.

"I'm afraid I'm going to shock you a little," the voice rasped.

"Whh... wh hap'ned," he gurgled, hardly able to produce a sound. "W-Will'm?" He moved his head, trying to look around, searching instinctively for his child. "Will'm?"

"Mr Graham, shhh. The boy is sleeping. He's had quite a scare."

Finally, his eyes started to cooperate. A figure loomed into view, propped into a chair of some kind, a single staring eye fixed onto him amongst a mess of scarred tissue that barely resembled a face. It took all his strength not to gasp in shock at the hideous visage.

"Wh't...?" Will mumbled, his mouth filled with cotton wool.

"Welcome to my humble pied-à-terre in the country. I'm sorry for the ungracious way you were brought here, but you see I didn't think you would come if I merely asked. You were, after all, about to flee the country to meet up with Dr Lecter, were you not?"

Will looked around. He was in a bed, attached to a heart monitor and a drip, his wrists bound with leather straps. The room was too big to belong to a hospital ward. A woman with blonde hair and a severe expression was standing by the doorway, watching them. He also caught sight of a short dark man sitting down in a chair in the corner, a gun visible on his belt, as well as a man in a white coat nearby attending the medical equipment. The room was quite dark, save the light streaming in from two large ornate windows on one wall. It hurt his eyes.

"Forgive me, I should introduce myself," the living corpse at his side drawled.

"M'son Verger," Will growled and tried to pull free of his restraints. But he didn't have the strength to make even a show of the attempt.

"Ah. Dr Lecter spoke of me. How gratifying," he said, sarcastically. Mason nudged something on his wheelchair and it spun aside, allowing him to give the woman at the door a glance and a wink, such as it was.

She breathed in and turned away from them both, staring out into the light of the windows with her arms folded.

"Let me go." His faculties were at last returning. Will could taste that he had been drugged; perhaps grabbed from behind in the parking lot at the airport and taken out before he even knew what was happening. He inwardly cursed himself for not being more diligent.

The half-face observing him seemed to twist into a distorted grin. "Why, when you are such a little treasure trove. I close my eyes, it's like he's here in the room. I don't have much of a nose anymore, but I can still scent you out. Your bond smells so sweet. And as for your boy, well!"

"Don't you fucking touch him."

Mason laughed at that. "You know, I'm surprised, I would have expected the good Doctor to go for something more refined than little you. I wonder what it was." His roving eye darted up and down across Will. "Hmm. Tell me, that lovely scar across your face, was that a gift from your mate? A little sexy cutting? You can tell me," he spoke rhythmically, like darting stabs, "just like he did to me, only I was more fun so he just kept... on... going?"

Will looked, really looked, into the ghastly eyeball of his captor, forcing himself to try to connect with the man underneath the monstrous visage. "Whatever Hannibal did to you, it has nothing to do with me or my son. Let us go. Please."

"You know, I thank God for what happened. It was my salvation. Have you accepted Jesus, Will Graham? Do you have faith?" When no answer came, he continued his strange rant. "I have immunity from the US Attorney and I have immunity from the Risen Jesus. And nobody beats the 'Ris'."

The man was insane. Whether he had always been, or whether the face had sealed it, it didn't matter. Will knew it would be that much harder to reason with him. His only chance was to connect, somehow. To understand him and draw him in.

"What happened to you?" he asked, consciously lowering his voice to a more congenial tone. "I only saw a news report."

"Oh, it was many years ago now. You may wonder what I am, Alpha, Beta or Omega? It's not so obvious these days."

The thought hadn't crossed Will's mind but he needed to play along. Underneath the sterile medical smells, he detected the muted scent of an Alpha.

"I don't like labels," Mason continued. "I'm... very versatile. I invited Dr Lecter to my house for a little after-therapy fun. Well, you know, he is quite the gentile Alpha. I came to the door in my nicest 'come hither' outfit. I was concerned he'd be afraid of me, but he didn't seem to be afraid of me. That's almost funny now."

"Because of what you did to the children in that Christian camp?"

Again, the vague outline of a smile appeared in his one functioning cheek. "Oh yes, the children. He knew my every secret. Loooong nights talking. I invited him to my home and I showed him my very best toys; my noose setup, among other things. It's a way you sort of hang yourself, but not really. It feels good while you, you know..."

Will couldn't hide the shudder of revulsion the image conjured up.

"Anyway, he said 'Mason, would you like a popper?' and I said, 'boy would I?'. Wow, once that kicked in, I was flying. He said, 'Mason, show me how you smile to gain the confidence of a child'. When I smiled, he said, 'ah, I see how you do it'. The good Doctor came up to me with a piece of broken mirror and said, "try this, try peeling off your face and feeding it to the dogs'."

"Stop," Will moaned, feeling bile rising through his stomach and burning his throat.

"He said, 'I can still see it, keep going,' on and on. And I did." He chuckled, softly, perhaps even sadly. "It seemed like a good idea at the time."

The eyeball returned from its reflections and fixed back onto Will. "He snapped my neck in the noose and walked away. And so now, I thought it might be fun to do the same to his lovely son. And other things."

Will's blood ran cold at those words and he knew it was no idle threat. "He's never even met his son. What makes you think he'd care? If you want to hurt him, hurt me."

"Oh no, I'm not interested in his second rate Omega. In fact, you seem like a good person. If you go into heat during your stay, I'll be happy to supply a nice proxy Alpha to fuck a brat into you. No, Dr Lecter... I know he came to see you in Florida. I know you supplied a boat for him and he made it to the Bahamas. I know you know where he is now. I'd like to return him to this country. And I'd like to show him what's left of his precious boy."

Will fought the leather straps with every bit of strength in his body, thrashing wildly and kicking his equally bound feet. His voice echoed around the cavernous room and seemed to boom, but it was to no avail. He had no possible way of getting free.

"Hush now, Mr Graham. We can make this all very easy if you just quiet down."

When his request was ignored, Mason nodded aside and the doctor in the white jacket appeared, bearing a syringe.

"No no no!" Will cried, trying to pull away.

The doctor pushed the needle roughly into his arm and more sedative was pumped into his veins.

"For god's sake Mason, are you trying to kill him?" the woman in the room snapped at last.

"Nothing so easy, my dear."

That was as long as Will managed to remain conscious.

*

He awoke with a start, and immediately a finger was pressed to his mouth to warn him against making a sound.

It was the woman he'd seen in the room earlier. She was cutting through the leather strap around one of his wrists with a scalpel. "Shh, we don't have much time."
Will blinked at her, not yet awake enough to speak. He could only stare, frowning.

"Dr Lecter was my shrink too. Um, I'm Margot. Mason's my cocksucking cunt of a brother." She sawed a few more times and the leather snapped. Then she placed the scalpel in his hand. "I warned Dr Lecter when he was in jail, you know, that Mason had found out about your little one."

Will recovered himself and unbuckled the rest of his straps, fighting the nausea and pain in his head.

"Where's William?"

"Go down the stairs and turn left. He's in one of the bedrooms. There are guards, so be careful. No dogs... Mason doesn't like them."

Margot handed him his shoes and his jacket. He gave her a long, searching look. "Why are you helping me?"

The woman swallowed hard and looked aside to the windows, where the light was no longer present. Her eyes were empty misty things, her bottom lip red and chewed. "Mason... Dr Lecter gave him what he deserved. He's a rapist sick son of a bitch. I fucking hate him."

Will stuffed his feet into his shoes and hurried to put his jacket on. "Come with us? Help us?"

Margot smiled, sadly. "Can't. I... I want to get pregnant but my Alpha is, um, she's got a low count. We need... his sperm..." She swallowed and then gave him a little push. "Just go. Get the kid out of here. Hurry."

He pocked the scalpel and stumbled towards the door, his body not entirely cooperating. Will had to stop to dry heave out some saliva that had pooled in his stomach before forcing himself onward, into what looked like a labyrinth of mirrors. His brain was desperate to shut down again and rest but he couldn't stop.

Will dragged himself down the steps, listening carefully and dodging behind the railings when he heard someone pass through the atrium at the bottom. He followed Margot's directions to slide into the side corridor and immediately picked up his son's scent.

The guard he'd seen before, the one with the gun, was standing in the doorway to the bedroom. Will crept up and pulled the scalpel out, summoning everything dark and feral that lived in him to drag it across the man's neck before he could choke out a scream. Blood exploded everywhere and the man kicked back, catching him in the knee and almost throwing entirely off balance. Thankfully he then went down and stopped moving without any further fuss.

William was laid flat out on top of a four poster bed, looking ashen. Will quickly checked him over for any signs of injury and was relieved to find nothing beyond a bruise to the forehead. He pulled off his coat and gathered him into a bundle inside it, knowing that time was of the essence if they were going to find a way out.

"Dad?" William groaned into his shoulder.

"Shh, it's alright buddy."

He felt woozy as he scurried along the corridors, trying not to make a sound, looking for a way out. Eventually, he found his way into a study with an open window. The drop down into the bushes below was not too far.

By now, William was lucid. Will set him down on his feet so he could pull the window open to the fullest amount.

"Dad!" he suddenly screamed.

Will span and recoiled as a bullet grazed past his arm, missing him by less than an inch. He grabbed William and turned his back to the gun, making himself into a shield, determined to protect his boy at all costs.

"Don't move!" the guard yelled.

"William, run," he whispered and threw him out of the window, watching to ensure he landed safely in the greenery below.

He span back towards the big man who was already advancing towards him. Will slid to his knees, heaving once again, fighting only long enough to prevent the guard from looking out of the window by dragging him down to the floor for a scrappy battle of wills.

The handle of the gun ended the matter as it collided with his temple.

*

Will was overjoyed to be the object of Mason Verger's wrath, because it meant that William had managed to get away somehow. He would bear every threat, every knock, every cut with cheer, so long as it was instead of his son.

He kept quiet about Margot's attempt to help him, recognising that she was as afraid of Mason as everyone else seemed to be. Will also determined that the large and strong female guard who put in an appearance every now and then, saying nothing, was Margot's Alpha mate. Their matching scents gave away their bond.

When Mason put Will into a noose and repeatedly choked him, he kept his eyes on Margot, pleading with her to intervene. She didn't leave the room but she didn't move to help either, just kept looking aside, sadly.

"Mr Graham, this can be quite the turn on. So tell me, are you feeling it yet?"

He couldn't speak; only glare.

Verger moved his wheelchair a little closer, the vestigial nostrils of his lump of a face quivering. "Hm, you smell a little hot. Heat on its way?"

Will knew it was entering the time when started changing, his body preparing, though he still had another few weeks to go before he would actively go into heat.

"Perhaps it would indeed be fun to break your bond. Old Dr Lecter would certainly find *that* rude," he chuckled, sibilantly. "Oh yes. But who should it be? Not Margot's girlfriend, with her useless Alpha cock. No brats at all to be had, though I'm sure it's a nice big one when it's out of its furry sheath and all a-ruttin'. Right sister?"

Margot seemed to groan but didn't move.

"Hmm, a dilemma. Perhaps I should give you a nice big sample of the baby stuff? What about that?"

If his neck wasn't so tense and restricted in the burning rope's embrace, Will thought he would have been sick.

"We could do with a Verger heir. Oh yes, in the name of Jesus, that would be a fun twist. A wonderful little gift for dear Dr Lecter."

Will saw the look that passed between Margot and her bodyguard girlfriend. It was pretty clear that they were only waiting for the right moment to get rid of Mason so Margot could inherit the family fortune. He desperately willed them to strike, but they hung back still, apparently seeing the need to be cautious.

"Turn him," Mason ordered, and the goon doing his bidding did just that, "rip that shirt off."

The cold air rushed around Will as the order was once again obeyed by the guard and he shivered, fearing what was to come neck.

"Grab that shard of glass and mark his back. I want my initials there," Mason chuckled.

Will bit into his lip, refusing to scream or make a sound as the glass sheared into his flesh and his blood began to trickle down.

"That's it, keep it neat. Lovely! Turn him back around."

After one more near-death experience with the noose, Mason ordered his guard to take Will down and strap him back onto the bed he'd awoken on. Mason wanted to go and take a nap, his paralysed body being too fragile and weak for this sort of exertion.

Will's voice was nothing more than a croak, but he put everything he could into his eyes as he cried out to Margot for help once more. She only gave him a slight smile and followed her brother out, leaving him to scream in his mind with only the now ever-present guards for company in the room that had become his prison.

Time was a fickle thing in the Verger house. Will had no idea how long he'd been there, but knew it must be a few days at least. The constant well of anger and resistance living in his stomach was the only thing getting him through the ordeal. His thoughts were constantly on William, hoping and praying he was safe somewhere. It was pure torture, on a scale beyond anything Mason Verger could imagine, not to know where he was or if he was alright.

Will lay and counted the seconds passing by, hours and hours disappearing. He thought of Hannibal and wondered if, somehow, he knew what had happened, like the Alphas of those stories who knew when their firstborn children were in danger, and sometimes their blood bonded mates too. Was he somehow there, in the shadows, ready to pounce and rescue him?

No, the thought was absurd. Will knew he was entirely on his own now. His back was burning where he'd been branded and he was certain he could feel his blood soaking into the bed beneath him. He couldn't contemplate it for long; the idea of bearing anything remotely related to that creature of a man repulsed him so thoroughly.

But then he was being carried somewhere. He had no idea when he had been let loose or where they were going in his delirium. Will surrendered to the sensation and pretended it was Hannibal, there as he dreamed he would be.

The next thing he knew, he was dropped onto a cold surface and covered in blankets. He heard female voices before everything around him started to growl and shake.

"He's paid, I checked the account. I've put the location he gave into the GPS," one said. "Hurry. I'll take care of Mason."

"I love you," a gruff female voice said.

"You too. Come back quick."

It took him a second to realise he was in a car, laid across the back seat. He was being driven away under a bundle of old sheets. The voices had to be Margot and her mate.

Will didn't have the strength to ask questions, or even move the blanket from his face. He was just relieved to be out of that house. Wherever he was being taken, it had to be better.

The drive went on and on and he was starting to feel quite sick again, the person at the wheel apparently burning some serious rubber to get to wherever they were going. Then, at last,

they came to a halt. The blanket was stripped away and tears immediately flooded his eyes against the bright sunlight that assaulted him.

He was roughly dragged out of the car and vaguely set onto his feet, the woman, whose name he had never heard, holding him up and moving him forward. "Come with me," she hissed. "Hurry up."

"Wh're are we?"

No response was given. He hobbled along with her, legs hurting from the battering they'd received in that initial beating Mason had ordered following William's escape. He was barely able to hold himself up. The pain was so intense it was taking his breath away.

The sun was reflecting off of the concrete they were going across and blinding him. Only when they came to a halt did he manage to glance up. What he saw immediately reduced him to tears.

"Dad!" William yelled and ran over to him, throwing himself into his arms.

Will didn't protest the pain at all, he was so relieved. "Thank god," he gasped and clung onto his son, totally overwhelmed with relief. "Oh thank god."

Another figure was emerging from the sunlight and for a moment, Will thought it was Hannibal. Then he realised.

"Count Lecter," Margot's girlfriend said, "I am told you paid the fee. He's all yours."

"Thank you," Robert said, genially, and tossed his cigarette aside. "Would you perhaps assist me in getting him inside?"

The woman hesitated, but then lifted Will into her arms, almost effortlessly. Will fought to keep holding onto William's hand as they moved along, into what looked like a small hanger.

Inside, a small white plane was parked with its door wide open, waiting to take them to safety.

Will had never felt so relieved in his life.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will didn't know what had actually happened until more than a week after they'd made it to Lithuania. His general injuries were compounded by an infection in the ugly cut marks on his back which knocked him right out and left him bedridden.

He wanted to know how and why the Count had come to save him. Given how he had made his distaste for his lack of breeding quite plain on their first meeting, he was an unlikely saviour of the hour.

William explained that he'd found the Count's business card in the pocket of Will's coat and, not knowing what else to do, found a payphone in the first town he'd come to after running away from Mason's house for all he was worth. The Count had come to help him, but William had refused to go with him unless he help his dad too. Apparently, he'd even looked up Jack Crawford's number online and threatened to turn himself in to the FBI if he didn't get his way. Somehow, he'd managed to change the Count's mind.

Contact was made with Margot, through her online business listings, and money offered for an exchange. Will guessed that, despite the family wealth, Mason was keeping his sister on a tight leash in that regard. The offer of a financial reward had been enough to turn her efforts at helping him from passive and quiet, to active and effective. William and the Count had flown the plane out of the private hanger he was renting on the outskirts of Baltimore to one nearer to Mason's country home to make the rescue and the rest was now history.

Lord only knew how Mason would have reacted when he found Will gone. Not that Will cared about that.

The curmudgeonly old Count still wasn't exactly happy about his presence. He had clearly had lofty intentions for his nephew, desiring him to mate with a pedigree highborn Omega with far bluer blood than anything Will could claim to possess. But in the end, he seemed to have accepted that what was done was done, and he wasn't getting rid of this inconvenient American pretender to the family line. It helped that Will and his son had to be hidden away in the most private wing of the castle, since there remained a need to keep their presence there as quiet as possible, just in case.

Will was in quite a state, even after he'd started to become more lucid. The exhaustion that had been everpresent at the core of his bones, really ever since he'd left hospital following the attack by Francis Dollarhyde, was truly overwhelming him now. He felt a great deal safer in the foreign castle than he had for a long time, and he could tell that William was a great deal happier to be there. It gave him the chance to breathe finally. William spoke to his dad very kindly of the Count's wife, the gentle Lady Murasaki, who Will did not ever meet but who was apparently occupying his son's time with some fun lessons in relation to the castle's store of old weaponry. It made Will happy to see William starting to return to his old self, despite everything that had happened.

Only one thing concerned him; Hannibal. He had asked after his mate when he had had a moment alone with the Count, only to be told that he was no longer sure of his whereabouts since their brief conversation while he'd been in Bimini. And even if he was in Florence, as Will suggested, there was no way to trace him now.

Will could feel the prickly beginnings of his heat starting to spread over his skin. He was getting nearer and nearer to it and, given that he hadn't taken any fertility medication since Florida, he could already tell it was going to be a powerful one. He considered attempting to make it to Italy and searching the streets of Florence for his mate, but his body wasn't strong enough yet.

He turned the ring that Hannibal had left for him over and over in his fingers while he waited and longed. The Count saw it and informed him that it was a Biscione herald, given originally to Hannibal's father by his mother as a token to assure of the purity of her Visconti bloodline. The line was a prestigious one, borne of ties between Italian rulers stretching back for hundreds of years. Hannibal's blood was truly a combination of Alpha nobilities, with the Lecter bloodline tracing back to the first Hannibal, a Carthaginian general who brought the Roman empire to the brink of ruin. The ring had been the one thing Hannibal had returned with after fleeing from Siberia, all alone.

Will couldn't hide the fact that the history lesson meant nothing to him. He had no interest in Hannibal as an avatar of noble families, all he knew was that he was claimed by him, for good or ill, as mate regardless of his own muddled mix of lines, and that was all that mattered. Will's less-than-blue blood was starting to burn with need, with no way to quench the fire. He was genuinely starting to feel afraid about getting through it alone.

Then, one day, he woke up to the most wonderful sound in the world.

"You know, most believe the viper on this herald is eating this man. And it's true, there is some precedence to the devouring of our enemies in my mother's bloodline. They were a bloodthirsty group. However, it is also equally possible that the viper is giving birth to this man; bringing life."

Will's eyelashes fluttered open and he saw the shape of a man seating on the side of his bed, the lamplight dim behind him.

"The snake is both Alpha and Omega, depending on one's interpretation."

"H... Hannibal?" Will asked, almost not daring to believe his eyes or his sense of smell.

Hannibal turned to him, a smile playing about his lips, his eyes sparkling. "I'm here."

Will forgot all his injuries and threw himself into Hannibal's arms, clumsily enough to have to be caught and molded into an embrace. He could hardly believe he was real.

"My dearest Will," Hannibal sighed. "I am more sorry than I can say for what happened. I had hoped you would make it to Italy, with the money and information I left hidden, before any harm could befall you. I would have found you there and we would have been safe together."

"It doesn't matter. You're here." Will snuggled into him, breathing him in and holding on as close as he could physically get.

Hannibal sighed, deeply. "My Uncle is not best pleased in my choice of mate. I had not wanted him to ever know of William, but I felt danger approaching you somehow, here." He patted his chest, over his heart. "I hoped he would help if called and I am glad that he did. When you didn't arrive in Florence, I decided to risk crossing some more borders to come here."

Will leaned his head on Hannibal's collarbone. "I'm going into heat. A few days more and..."

"I had hoped to be away from here for it, but you are not well enough." Hannibal stroked the faint rope burns still visible around Will's neck with his thumb and kissed his nose, and then his cheek, across the healing scar line there. "I will make preparations for our solitude. And, in the end, perhaps it will be fitting to be here, in the castle of my family." He continued his trail to kiss his ear, and then whispered with hot breath, "You are not on any pills, I can taste it. I will breed you."

The intimation went straight down to Will's lower belly in a hot bolt of lightning white pleasure. He couldn't help but groan in anticipation.

"Is that what you want?"

Hannibal wrapped his arms around him and nuzzled into his hair. "You know it is."

He'd fought a lot of demons in his own mind, and a lot of monsters in the outside world, to finally fall into his mate's arms with a free conscience. While he still knew that, on some level, he was betraying the Will Graham of morals and good intentions, the laudable figure of a man he once had been, this scarred and beaten and weary version was the only thing left and so there was no contest to be had. Finally, in the darkness of the castle where Hannibal had once sought refuge as a traumatised child, Will too had arrived as a child seeking a new life. It was fitting. At last, he was ready to surrender and be completely free.

Chapter End Notes

Note: The ring referred to bears this image: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biscione. It's the emblem of the House of Visconti.

Chapter 7

Everything was different this time. Everything.

The first time, when their son was conceived, Will was a mess of anger and unwillingness to admit just how drawn he had always been to Hannibal Lecter, a man who turned out to be everything he'd ever despised in humanity. The entire thing had all been tinged with the unreality of his encephalitis-addled brain and he had struggled to make sense of anything at all really. The circumstances had been terrible on every level.

The second time, in the clinical suite of a sanctioned mating facility, Will had been trapped, at war with himself over his desire to reaffirm his primal connection to his bonded mate and his equally strong need to get the answers he needed to catch a serial killer. He'd gained both but still left there feeling conflicted beyond breaking point, the yearning not quite sated.

Now Will was ready to put it all aside. He'd bled enough for his morals and principles and the world still looked the same. Hannibal was a ruthless and unrestrained destroyer of lives and Will a primally chosen creator of life; both of them were the viper on the ring. In the end, it just didn't matter. It was a cycle of the world that would always exist.

Count Robert was clearly still not pleased about Will's presence, or even Hannibal's, but his annoyance was muted by the slowly growing bond he was forming with William - even if he did complain about his name ("he should be Hannibal, it's the tradition!"). Despite this, Hannibal had had to be quite forceful in his demands to close off the wing of the castle where he wished to bed down, and even when a modicum of agreement was gained, Robert kept insisting that it would be better if they found somewhere else to go. In the end, Lady Murasaki softened her husband's stance and made the necessary arrangements for them.

Hannibal took Will to a grand chamber at the top of the castle's east turret, with a view of mountains in the distance, where the mists rolled off the sides and the dawn light was said to be a truly spectacular sight. Nourishment was stored about the room by servants and the bed covered in pillows and soft furnishings to ensure comfort and give the sense of being in a private nest. The grand fireplace was lit for them as the light faded, creating a warm glow for their arrival.

When his heat finally overcame him, Will had never been so ready for anything in his life. He languidly lay down on the soft cushions and let Hannibal remove his clothes, piece by piece. His body was not beautiful, covered as it was in scars and bruises, but the look that overcame Hannibal's face was enough to make him forget all of his past hurts. He felt right and whole beneath his touch.

Hannibal took his time mapping out the new scars, tongue flicking over the puckered dents where bullets had been embedded. He slowly made his way upwards and settled on top of Will, tangling his fingers in his curls. Hannibal traced light kisses along the long scar he bore on his face, acknowledging the significance of it.

"Our scars are the marks left by things that have shaped us," he whispered. "These have changed you"

Will closed his eyes for a moment to gather his thoughts. "What do you see?"

"The weight of guilt is gone. You have embraced your truest nature; that dark place created by your empathy." There was no triumph or even pleasure in his tone. Just an odd heavy sadness.

"Isn't this what you wanted?"

Hannibal considered the question for a long time, kissing Will everywhere he could reach while it hung in the air; across his forehead, on his nose, his chin, around his a neck. "I never wished to see you broken," he said at last' "I feel... grief, for my part. But also great relief."

Will smiled, sadly, and pulled him into a deep kiss of gentle caressing tongues which escalated the sensation of anticipation that was starting to gain momentum between them.

"So I will not be parted from you again?" Hannibal asked, as though both making a declaration and checking on a point of concern that haunted him. It seemed fanciful that Will would set the law on him again, after everything, but he seemed to need the reassurance.

"Never," Will confirmed.

"We will be hunted."

"I know."

"I will die to keep you safe. This I promise."

"I know."

Hannibal opened his hand to reveal that he had been concealing his mother's ring. He sat astride Will and took hold of his hand, gently, to place the heirloom over the white band of flesh where Will's wedding ring had previously been. There was no need for him to make his intentions any clearer than that.

"You also know that I love you," Hannibal continued, with meaning, as though they were words he'd never spoken before and had never expected to have cause to use.

"Yes." Will pulled him back down so they were chest to chest. "You have ruined me," he sighed and didn't even try to sound upset. There was no way to pretend anyway, not with his legs already moving to hook around Hannibal and his hardness throbbing between them in his boxer shorts.

The building mutual desire unleashed completely like a supernova and Hannibal was suddenly pressing him down hard, devouring him, his Alpha saliva spiking through Will's system like a drug and making him groan with pleasure. He bit a trail down Will's chest and stomach and tore his boxers right off to keep going, taking him in his mouth eagerly and with total abandon.

Will groaned in encouragement, every part of him on fire, the want to consummate their bond hitting him like a fever rush. He reveled in the ministrations, hips swaying, but pushed Hannibal away when he felt his release coming too soon.

Slowly, to avoid aggravating his bruises, he rolled onto his front and drew up to his knees, slick and ready. Hannibal moved forward but then paused and hung back unexpectedly. He clung onto Will's thighs and pulled him closer, staring at the white square of gauze taped on his lower back.

Will guessed that his wound had been seeping, the blood pattern betraying what lay underneath. Hannibal pulled it away to reveal the six slash marks placed there, the hideous /\/\ \/ pattern.

Will burned, hating the recollection, the copper taste of disgust on his tongue. He heard a deep growl rumbling through Hannibal's chest and tensed. It was a sound he'd never heard before. He risked a glance back and saw Hannibal's eyes burning with barely contained anger. His fingers pressed into Will harder and he licked the wounds clean, caught by a primal need to reclaim his mate from the mark of another. The sensation slowly relaxed Will again.

He gasped and keened as Hannibal suddenly moved and eased himself inside, the growling diminishing to a rhythmic grunt of pleasure. Hannibal bit into his shoulder, hard, marking him with his own seal of ownership as he started to move his hips.

Will gripped the side of the mattress with one hand while the other curled over Hannibal's hand as it settled on the fuzz of his lower belly. His Omega biology felt like a precious gift, the feeling of being claimed and mated more satisfying than anything else in the world, his insides vibrating with pleasure, his stomach bulging repeatedly beneath their hands.

The knot was pressing against him more and more, seeking to join them together. Will pressed back, needing it desperately. It slid home and Hannibal stilled, leaving them each gasping and groaning as it grew and pushed them over the edge of the precipice together.

Will collapsed down and sank into his mate's arms, euphoria washing over him with the feel of Hannibal's release warming him inside, every part of him relaxed and strangely happy. He waited for the old sense of guilt for loving a monster to suffocate the moment, but it simply never came.

That was when he really knew he was lost for good.

Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Alpha Dilemma
Dr Alana Bloom

It is an undeniable fact that the numerical ratio of Alphas significantly exceed that of any other demographic represented in the American penal system. Recent studies have estimated a ratio of up to 82 per cent, against 15 per cent Beta and a mere 3 per cent Omega, for convictions related to violent crime. This is stark against the general population ratio of 40 per cent Beta, and 30 per cent Alpha and Omega, respectively.

Decoding the complex psychology of the Alpha must therefore be of prime importance to our relative social cohesion. Their psychosocial drives can be deemed to be very simple if popular culture is any indicator. They are generally portrayed as brute hunter-gatherers, physically stronger and more able than their Beta or Omega counterparts, with a primal need to stalk their mates as if they are prey and to subdue them. That this is incompatible with the modern dynamic of our liberal society has even been cited as just cause during criminal proceedings. One lawyer famously attempted to create a legal precedent for Alpha biochemistry as a cause of temporary madness in a rape trial in Iowa, 1995.

Behavioural science is rightly fascinated by the Alphas among us. However, studies have so far been generally skewed in favour of more notorious Alphas; historical conquerors, disgraced politicians and convicted serial murderers, for example. Not all Alphas follow expected patterns and many are upstanding members of society. The question then is, what is the great separator of the two?

Dr Frederick Chilton conducted extensive research on the subject prior to his disappearance during a lecture tour in the Bahamas three years ago. In his final published paper, he argued that the pair bonding phenomenon specifically relating to Omegas, which he believed could focus the violent tendencies of the Alpha from active and potentially criminal, to the passive and protective, should be used to formulate a means of behaviour modification. Although the system of intense psychological conditioning he instigated has since been discredited following a lawsuit against the State of Maryland, brought by Dr Abel Gideon, an inmate of the Baltimore State Asylum where his system was refined,

A knock on the door made Jack Crawford jump. "Enter," he barked. He searched for the paragraph he was on but it was lost.

Jack dropped the magazine onto his desk, frowning at the interruption.

"Agent Crawford, Sir." A young woman burst in, cheeks flush, her manner breathless but very focused.

"Agent Starling. What can I do for you?"

"We have a potential Lecter sighting." She dropped a manila file on his desk, right on top of Alana's article, and opened it up. "These photos were taken of some of the singers dining in an outdoor restaurant near the Manaus Opera House in Brazil about nine days ago."

The young agent spread them out in a square.

"What am I looking at?"

"These are blown up images of the people in the background. Some bright spark in the editorial department of a local paper spotted them." Starling grabbed the nearest pen and used it to point to one figure in particular; a man in a white linen suit and trilby hat. His face was only caught in any sort of detail in one of the photos, which Starling pointed out to him eagerly. "We've got a few eyewitness accounts gathered at my request by the local feds and they have confirmed the resemblance after being shown photos of Dr Lecter."

Jack leaned in and examined it. Hannibal Lecter's image had been running on the FBI's 10 Most Wanted list for years, and he'd got a lot of press a few years back when he was caught on CCTV sneaking into the home of one of his few surviving victims, Mason Verger, shortly before the man was found suffocated by an eel, his body covered in burn marks from an electric cattle prod. His sister had confirmed to the police that Lecter murdered her brother before making an escape, and gone on the news to make an appeal, leading to Lecter's face being splashed across news bulletins across America for days.

Until that occurred, Jack had assumed Lecter was long out of the country and deep in hiding. He still wasn't entirely sure why he'd returned, just to kill that man, and why he'd been so unconcerned about being seen on the exterior CCTV. It just didn't add up. Either way, they had lost the trail completely after that.

The man Starling was pointing out in the photo did look very much like him, but it was the person next to him that caught Jack Crawford's attention. "That's Will Graham," he said, dully. There was no doubt at all.

Starling stared at him for a moment, her eyes sparkling with intelligence. She had quite clearly picked up on his lack of enthusiasm but elected not to mention it. "That scar across his face matches the profile but, well, you knew him best. So this confirms they're together."

Crawford nodded. He'd really wanted to believe that the sudden disappearance of Will and his son weren't connected to Lecter's escape, even though it made too much sense to ignore.

"And look at the kids here, just across from them."

Jack followed her pen as it tapped on two smaller figures on the other side of the table, one in a high chair.

"The boy is about the right age to be William Graham Jnr. And you remember that suspect 'Michaela Lecter' birth certificate I got pulled from the hospital in Florence, with their names

in the parent fields? A few of the eyewitnesses who were dining nearby overheard the little girl being called Mia, which is probably short for Michaela. It makes sense."

One of the photos was a greatly zoomed in shot of the two children. The little boy's head was turned, so Jack couldn't be sure that it was William, even though he had the same fair hair and bone structure that he remembered. But the toddler was fully in view and she looked startlingly like Will, even in blurry form, with dark curls falling about her shoulders and big blue eyes. Even her smile pained him with familiarity.

"It does make sense," he agreed. His eyes settled on a photo which depicted Lecter leaning to deliver a kiss to Will's cheek. It also seemed quite obvious that their hands were also joined under the table.

The serenity of Will's expression took Jack's breath away momentarily. He involuntarily remembered the day he had introduced them, in the very office he was now sitting in, bringing Lecter in on Dr Alana Bloom's recommendation. He was supposed to psychoanalyse Will and assess his ability to withstand the strain of hunting the serial killer who would later be named the Minnesota Shrike. Jack recalled the transfixed expression on Lecter's face as they met and Will had matched his verbal sparring naturally. Despite being prickly and terse throughout, Will had very much caught his attention, to a degree nobody had foreseen at the time. In hindsight, it chilled him to the core.

A sudden thought struck him. "Wasn't Abigail Hobbs down in South America studying?" He didn't maintain contact but her movements were still flagged down in the computer system as a person likely to be contacted by a convict on the run. Jack had noted her enrollment in the University of the State of Amazonas nearly a year ago.

"The daughter of Garrett Jacob Hobbs?" Starling asked, not entirely understanding the connection at first. That case had been long before her time, but she appeared to have filled herself in on the general notes about it at least. "You think they might have paid her a visit?"

"Given their history, I'd say it's a strong possibility. She needs to be questioned."

"I'll get on it," Starling confirmed, already moving towards the door. She paused as she opened it, and turned back to him with uncertainty. "Sir, are you alright? You seem... kind of unenthusiastic."

If anyone else had made that comment, he would have torn them to shreds. She was lucky he had a rather paternal fondness for her. "It's just... been a long day," he sighed. "Good work Starling. Keep me informed of any developments."

"Will do, Sir."

The door of his office clicked closed and Jack found himself staring at the photos still laid across his desk. The truth was, Starling was right. His enthusiasm for the chase had waned a long time ago. No matter how much he despised Hannibal Lecter, Will had genuinely paid his dues and done a lot of good. He was still a legend amongst the young FBI trainees specialising in behavioural sciences for catching two serial killers without ever even making it to the level of a full Agent. Regardless of what he had become, Jack couldn't forget that.

He shuffled the print outs back together into a pile and shut them back into the file, unable to look at the contented look on Will's face any more. It was too painful.

With a long sigh, he put the file aside and picked up Alana's article again. But after attempting to read further into it twice, Jack set it aside, his concentration now too disturbed to continue. He busied himself by taking the file across to his cabinet and adding it to the large section on Lecter.

After a moment of thought, he took it back out and moved it across to the much smaller section he'd opened on Will Graham. He put it in next to the cards he had received every year on the anniversary of Bella's death and felt another pang of sadness at how life had turned out.

If anyone knew how hard it was to be parted from a bonded mate, it was Jack Crawford. Perhaps losing Bella had given him a greater perspective on why Will had been unable to ever really sever his ties to Hannibal Lecter, and why, after years of fighting it, he'd finally had to go to him. The endless well of loneliness and longing was a fate he wouldn't wish on anyone.

Jack snapped the cabinet closed and privately hoped it wouldn't be opened again. Then he turned out the lights and finally called it a night.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone who has read this story - my first ever in this fandom! Questions/comments are gratefully received.

Some Research Links that Contributed to This Story
http://www.typhoidandswans.com/lovinglecter/leda/essay_serpent.html
http://www.serialkillercalendar.com/io-of-hannibal-lecter.html

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!